(b) Efforts being made to boost tourism industry in the country include improvement of infrastructural facilities for tourism, development of tourist attractions, strengthening of publicity and promotional efforts, human resource development and encouraging private investment.

Service Term of Former CMD, ITDC

1650. SHRI GAYA SINGH: Will the Minister of TOURISM be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the news-item captioned "Two shortlisted for ITDC top post" appearing in Business Line, dated 23rd April, 1990;

(b) if so, the reasons for not awarding another service term to former Chairman and M.D., ITDC whose performance appraisal was well appreciated by the Ministry;

(c) whether Government are considering to appoint non-professionals and controversial officials of ITDC as named in the news report; and

(d) if answer to part (c) above be in the negative the reasons therefor and justification for not extending the term of former CMD of ITDC, till date?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM (SHRI OMAK APANG): (a) to (d) Yes Sir. The matter of awarding another term to former Chairman and Managing Director, ITDC is under examination in accordance with law and directions of the Delhi High Court.

Buddhist Pilgrims from Asian Countries

1651. DR. MOHAN BABU: Will the Minister of TOURISM be pleased to state:

(a) whether a plan has been drawn up to increase the flow of Buddhist pilgrims from other Asian countries; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM (SHRI OMAK APANG): (a) and (b) The overseas marketing plan of the Department of Tourism, Govt. of India, gives due emphasis to tapping of the Buddhist pilgrim market segment from Asian countries by way of advertising of the Buddhist circuits in electronic and print media, familiarisation fam tours, brochures support, direct mailing and "Know India" seminars.

Inadequate Funding for Buddhist site

1652. DR. MOHAN BABU: Will the Minister of TOURISM be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Buddhist sites in Visakhapatnam are hit by inadequate funding for proper conservation;

(b) if so, the reasons for neglecting the sites; and

(c) the steps proposed to safeguard the sites for tourists especially from Japan, China, Indonesia & Sri Lanka?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM (SHRI OMAK APANG): (a) to (c) According to the information available from the State Government, there has not been any inadequacy of funds for the conservation of Kotturu and Sankaram. However, in the case of Bavikonda and Thotlakonda which are under the control of State Archaeology Department, the conservation/re-construction work was discontinued in 1994 due to paucity of funds. The State Government is taking steps to continue conservation and safeguard the sites for tourists.

Industrial Status to Tourism Sector

1653. PROF. RAM KAPSE:
SHRI RAMNATH KOVIND:
DR. RANBIR SINGH:

Will the Minister of TOURISM be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have under consideration a proposal to give industrial status to the tourism sector;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) by when the proposal is expected to be finalised and implementation initiated; and

(d) the anticipated benefits likely to accrue to Government by this decision?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM (SHRI OMAK APANG): (a) to (d) It has not been possible to grant industry status to tourism by amending IDR Act as there is no manufacture or production of any of the articles mentioned in the first schedule of the Act. However, various incentives like income tax exemption, interest subsidy, reduced customs duty, etc. are already being provided by the Union Government to the tourism sector.

Visit of Foreign Toursists to India

1654. SHRI VEDPRAKASH P. GOYAL: Will the Minister TOURISM be pleased to state:

(a) the total number of foreign tourists who visited India during year 1997-98 i.e. upto 31st March, 1998;

(b) whether this number is less than that of tourists visiting in 1996-97;

(c) if so, the reasons therfor; and

(d) the steps being taken to attract more tourists?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM (SHRI OMAK APANG) (a) and (b) Total number of foreign tourists who visited India during 1996-97 and 1997-98 were 23,34,438 and 23,70,985 respectively registering an increase of 1.6% during 1997-98 as compared to 1996-97.

(c) and (d) Does not arise.

Development of Tourist Spots in Karnataka

1655. SHRI S.M. KRISHNA: Will the Minister TOURISM be pleased to state;

(a) whether Government have formulated any plan to develop tourist spots in Karnataka during the current financial year;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) The amount of financial assistance allocated for the purpose and spent so far for development of tourism in Karnataka?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM (SHRI OMAK APANG) (a) and (b) The tourism develoment plans for any specific State is prepared by the respective State. The Ministry of Tourism provides financial assistance on the basis of specific project proposals received from the State Governments every year.

(c) During the year 1997-98, the Ministry of Tourism sanctioned financial assistance of Rs. 130.78 lacks for the implementation of tourism projects in Karnataka. The projects for 1998-99 have not yet been identified.

Development of Brahmaputra as a Tourist Destination

1656. DR. Y. LAKSHMI PRASAD: Will the Minister of TOURISM be pleased to state:

(a) Whether it is proposed to explore development of the Brahmaputra as tourist destination;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the action taken to increase tourism related activities like development of road and rail linkage and amenities for tourists to develop the waterway?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM (SHRI OMAK APANG) (a) to (c) Yes, Sir. The Government of Assam has taken steps to develop tourist activities in Brahmaputra. The steps taken by the State Government in this regard include organising Brahmaputra beach festival, organising rafting expeditions, operating river cruises etc. The State Government has also taken steps to develop road linkages to different tourist destinations.